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BRIEFING PAPER

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Your Meeting With  
Salvadoran Minister of Defense Vides Casanova

Setting

DefMin Gen. Vides Casanova is considered one of El Salvador's most progressive military leaders and was among Duarte's strongest supporters during his daughter's kidnapping. There was criticism of Duarte's handling of the kidnapping, but he is rebounding. He handled recent public sector strikes well. He plans to implement difficult austerity measures in January, including devaluation (raising prices in some basic commodities) and higher taxes to reduce the government budget deficit. Other priorities include the national plan and agrarian reform compensation. Military field commanders increasingly favor small unit operations, psyops, better intelligence, and improved community relations and civic action. In spite of the October 10 raid on the La Union training center, the military continues to show greater success in the field. Terrorism in the cities is a growing threat. Salvadorans are worried by reduced U.S. assistance levels.

I. Meeting Objectives

- o To emphasize the U.S. commitment to Salvadoran democracy, to frankly explain U.S. security assistance limits, and to encourage improved air-land coordination in military operations.

II. Talking Points

- o We continue to be impressed by improvements in your military operations -- your discipline, the number of operations you field, your efforts to protect the civilian population.

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- o Even the recent raid on the La Union training center showed improved ~~morale~~ rapid reaction, professionalism.
- o We hope that you will continue to improve coordination of air and ground forces, both to rapidly insert ground troops after airborne softening or to rapidly provide air support when ground troops are pressed.
- o We are aware of the increasing threat of terrorism. You have defeated every other insurgent tactic; we are prepared to help you defeat this one.
- o Unfortunately, our program to assist police forces has been a lightning rod for opposition in our Congress, aggravated by budget-cutting and a human rights offensive by opponents of our policy toward El Salvador.
- o We hope to be able to provide funding of about \$122 million in military assistance for FY 1985, plus about \$10 million to help support your public security forces. Another \$10 million would be available through the Harkin amendment if the judicial case against Capt. Avila could be successfully concluded. We hope for, but cannot be confident of, more funds later in the year.
- o This budget problem underscores the need to conduct operations as effectively as possible. Improved air-ground coordination and the National Plan are key.
- o Again, on behalf of President Reagan, I want to assure you of our highest regard for President Duarte and his military commanders. You have our continued commitment.

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